

March of the bar mitzvah old boys

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Religious Affairs Correspondent

When Gerry Adler and Rhona Lubner stepped up for their bar and bat mitzvah ceremonies, they were much less nervous than the average Jewish teenager. This is because they were 73 and 83 respectively.

The ceremonies traditionally mark a child's coming of age, but rabbis say that an increasing number of Jews are holding a second bar or bat mitzvah to celebrate having survived adulthood.

A bar mitzvah for a boy is held at the age of 13, while bat mitzvahs for girls take place at the age of 12 or 13 and only in more liberal congregations. Many Jews are now choosing to mark the anniversary of their first ceremony by holding a second service at the age of 63, 73 or 83. The last is particularly popular as the Torah describes the average lifespan as 70 — so the age of 83 is 13 years into a "second" lifetime.

Rabbi Jonathan Romain, of Maidenhead Synagogue, said of the growing trend: "It simply wasn't on when people died younger or were not as mentally alert at 83 [and] capable of study and, often, relearning Hebrew after years of neglect."

When conducted for a child, a bar or



Gerry Adler had his second bar mitzvah at 73, and practised the Torah from a CD

bat mitzvah marks the first time a Jew is considered eligible to read out a section from the Torah in Hebrew in front of the synagogue's congregation. They also make a speech and deliver prayers. Rabbi Romain said that they tended to

be "more joyous" in later life. "[They] celebrate a life that has reached fulfilment, even if it has involved difficulties along the way, whereas at 13 the mood can be nervous or anticipatory," he said. An older Jewish woman may be

having her first bat mitzvah if she grew up in an orthodox community.

Ms Lubner had her second bat mitzvah in November. "It felt like an accomplishment," she said. "It was one of the few things I did for myself rather than for anyone else. I found a great satisfaction and almost comfort in it. After the service I was surrounded by lots of elderly people I didn't know who were absolutely inspired by it. I have seven grandchildren, aged from 16 to 26, and they all took part in the service."

Gerry Adler spent three months practising chanting a passage from the Torah from an instruction CD for his second bar mitzvah. He said: "It was far more enjoyable. There is so much apprehension as a 13-year-old at the magnitude of learning what you have to do. At 73 I found it engaged my brain tremendously and I really enjoyed the process."

Rabbi Laura Janner-Klausner, the senior rabbi for Reform Judaism, said that it was moving to see a woman who had been denied a bat mitzvah as a teenager perform the ceremony. She said: "When you're 13, you're affirming your adulthood. When you have it at 83 you're affirming your adulthood and saying, 'Thank God I'm still here and can read the Torah.'"

Veteran seeks Spitfire pilot, 70 years on

Simon de Bruxelles

A US navy veteran is hoping to track down the wartime Spitfire pilot who gave him his cap nearly 70 years ago.

Byron Nilsson made friends with the pilot, Ted Cooper, on a visit to Portsmouth in June 1949 while serving on the battleship USS *Missouri*.

Mr Nilsson, who lives in Liverpool, a small village in the state of New York, met Mr Cooper's wife and three-year-old daughter over dinner. The two men agreed to exchange caps. Mr Nilsson, 89, said: "The next day, Ted and his wife came aboard *Missouri* and we did the trade. I recently found the hat and wanted to return this important piece of family memorabilia. I hope someone reading this article will know Ted and help me return it to his family."

The two stayed in touch for a time. Mr Cooper sent him copies of *Punch* while Mr Nilsson sent him the *New York Times* review sections. They lost contact when Mr Nilsson began active duty in 1950. He said that Mr Cooper, as well as flying Spitfires during the war, trained pilots in Canada.

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